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Commission on the Status of Women
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Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by HelpAge International, International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, and Soroptimist International, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; Associated Country Women of the World, Centre for Women, the Earth, the Divine, European Women's Lobby, International Federation of University Women, Italian Centre of Solidarity, National Council of German Women's Organizations, Pax Romana, Salvation Army, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Socialist International Women, and Women's International Zionist Organization, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and European Union of Women and International Association for Counseling, non-governmental organizations on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2002/1.

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We, the above-named international non-governmental organisations in consultative status with ECOSOC, members of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Status of Women, welcome the decision of the Commission on the Status of Women to focus at its 46th session on women, poverty and the environment.

Environmental management and mitigation of natural disasters: a gender perspective.

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21 both recognise the important role that women have in environmental management and sustainable development. The Beijing Platform for Action also recognises the important role of women in paras 34, 35 and 246-258.

Principle 20 of the Rio declaration states that women have a vital role to play in environmental management and environment. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieving sustainable development. Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 entitled "Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development" was also endorsed.

We recognise that the connection between women, natural resources and environmental management gained attention when it became apparent that the twin crisis in development and ecology were closely linked. The chemical and radioactive contamination of soil, air and water, the decreasing biodiversity, the alarming rate of depletion of resources and deforestation pose not only local but global problems, the increase in poverty and population and gender inequalities signal the need for more comprehensive approaches to environmental management that includes sociological and ecological concerns.

Today, we are still transforming from a general concept into pragmatic actions at the local, national, regional and international levels. Current development planning and projects do not take into consideration the holistic nature of human activity and thus ignore women's experience, knowledge, administrative and managerial skills. Often development practices have had unexpected side effects due to the lack of consultation and participation of women, especially at the local level.

We believe that the main constraints with which women are confronted in achieving full integration and participation in environmental management and mitigation of natural disasters are: lack of education and training, lack of participation in planning, programming and projects, lack of information and awareness-raising methodologies, lack of financial means and lack of choices in the various types of technologies.

One of the main reasons for these constraints is that policy-makers, planners and project managers lack both a comprehensive data-base on women's involvement in this sector, the political will and the capacity to plan for and implement appropriate interventions to promote women's participation.

The principal victims of environmental degradation are the most underprivileged people, and the majority of these are women and children. Their problems, and those of the environment, are very much interlinked. Both are marginalised by existing development policies. And because of the complex cycles of poverty, inequitable development and environmental degradation, poor people have been forced into ways of living which further induce destruction. Women often have no choice but to overuse natural resources to survive. Actions designed to conserve natural resources and rehabilitate degraded and polluted environments can simultaneously give women back their control over scarce resources and a means to better livelihood.

In spite of the importance of women's involvement in environmental management, their role in planning and management is far from reaching acceptable levels. Their work has been taken for granted, and its economic and social value unrecognised.

We therefore call on Member States

- to urgently adapt development strategies and activities in order to benefit from the participation of women in the planning and development of environmental and natural resources management;

- to bring about structural and attitudinal changes in institutions, including new integrated management systems in human, financial and natural resources;

- to explicitly provide for, within the section of institutional arrangements, the incorporation of women in research and training as well as capacity building;

- to promote the use of gender disaggregated monitoring indicators already identified and to further identify new and crucial gender-sensitive indicators in the future.